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Authoritarian Neoliberalism in Africa: All Pain, No Gain

ABSTRACT

As a region of the world capitalist political economy, Africa is the epitome of neoliberalism as a universal project to remake societies in its image. The realisation of neoliberal programmes of change encountered a region already ensconced in state-forms that were authoritarian, albeit very often weaker than their analogues in Latin America or Southern Europe. In these circumstances, neoliberalism both reconstructed and relied upon authoritarian state practice: reassertions of law and order, rising technocracy, re-built bureaucracies, and 'choiceless democracy'. Reviewing these neoliberal authoritarian constructions, one is struck by how poorly they performed as vehicles for market-based capitalist transformation. In a phrase, the pain of neoliberal adjustment was accompanied by no palliative of sustained economic 'gain'. This conjuncture is pivotal to an understanding of moves by some governing elites to explore and at times implement non-neoliberal development strategies.

Introduction

This article argues that authoritarian neoliberalism in Africa is a failed strategy of capitalist transformation. Aspiring to combine an administrative and technocratic governance with economic liberalism, authoritarian neoliberalism has not generated a sustained process of accumulation, investment, and sectoral change away from low-productivity economies. As such, neoliberalism combines both a normatively troubling mode of governance with a useless economic model. Conceptualising authoritarianism as a state form historically generated by the absence of a socially-dominant bourgeoisie, we pose the question whether the neoliberal project effectively infuses this state form with the wherewithal to promote capitalist development which is its fundamental claim to legitimacy. Finally, we identify how the neoliberal project is currently weakened in Africa, and that African governments and intellectuals are constructing possible alternatives to it, albeit still within the authoritarian mode of governance.

Neoliberal social project, authoritarian state

Neoliberalism

It is now well-recognised that the term neoliberalism is in danger of losing its identity, or at least having successfully developed through conceptual diffusion

rather than focus (Venugopal 2015). Beyond its signification of a “critical” approach to the free market, it is difficult to pin down a conceptual definition that is workable between writers who commonly have different theoretical concerns and methodologies. Neoliberalism has been used to identify a reinvigorated neoclassical/laissez-faire ideology of the market society (Stedman Jones 2012; Turner 2011); to focus on the shift in the political economy of capitalism towards finance based in an attacked on labour and regulation (Crouch 2011; Dumènil & Lévy 2004; Harvey 2005); to express concern with the changes in state form that involve technical and depoliticising institutions and discourse (Demmers et al. 2004); to characterise governmentalities based in the rationalities of individualism and responsibility (Joseph 2013; Lerner 2000; Ong 2006); to criticise a wide range of actions by capital and international financial institutions (Cammack 2002; Owusu 2003); to announce new global regimes (Gill 1995), new ideologies of ‘common sense’, new social-psychologies, and affects (Brown 2015). It is also the case that writers have been wont to see neoliberalism in recombinant, “rolled out”, and “inclusive” forms: present in many places and in many guises, a move that improves the concept’s ability to engage with diverse social realities but which also renders the concept even less distinct (Ong 2007; Peck & Tickell 2003; Porter & Craig 2004).

There is, of course, a simple core premise within this expansive literature which is expressed by Giroux as well as anyone: a ‘belief that the market should be the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions’ (Giroux 2004: xii). It is just that the subsequent analytical and methodological move that this definition suggests is radically unfixed. Thus, it is important to set out as clear a conceptualisation of the term as we can here before proceeding any further. In this article, neoliberalism is understood to be a global social project to realise an ideology of the free market into as many aspects of the political economy as possible (Harrison 2010; Gill & Cutler 2014: 9). It is based on the core neoclassical tenet that free markets are socially-optimal, efficient, and tend towards equilibrium (Shaikh 2005) and it is animated by a desire to realise this particular market ontology principally through states. As such, neoliberalism’s drivers are practices to marketise all aspects of social life and to fashion states into institutions to enforce this marketisation.

Neoliberalism as a social project is realised through classes, cadres, and epistemic communities dedicated to the universal realisation of a more or less coherent neoliberal world. This is as utopian or millenarian a project as any in modern political ideology (Clarke 2005: 51; Comaroff & Comaroff 2000). It is ambitious, expansive, and combative. It is unrealised, but it possesses enough faith, evidence, resource, power, and legitimacy to render it a component of almost every political institution in the world. It has amply demonstrated its tenacity (Mirovski 2013; Streeck 2017). The social project of neoliberalism is expansive; it is about the creation of regulations, habits, disciplines and incentives, and norms. The *telos* of these practices is a universal condition in which neoliberalism is understood as a natural phenomenon, not a political one.

The literature on neoliberalism is more than sufficiently diverse and contentious to expect that this brief definitional standpoint might be subjected to all manner to criticisms. That makes our definition unexceptional. The framing of neoliberalism as

a social project does however, allow us to focus on the empirical and material nature of neoliberalism. It allows us both to maintain a relatively clear sense of neoliberalism's ideological core without slipping into the ideationalist trap in which the neoliberalism has its own agency.

It also allows us to accept neoliberalism as, *ab initio*, a 'dirty' and incomplete phenomenon without getting tied up in sometimes overly-complex discussions about hybridity, contextualisation, and contestation (Ong 2006). As a social project, neoliberalism is intrinsically and constitutively hybrid and compromised by all manner of socio-political institutions which 'corrupt' the ideal, economistic or technically pure abstractions that might be used to theorise neoliberalism (Fine 2015).

Authoritarianism

There is a rough and stylised way of seeing authoritarianism as statist, centralised and undemocratic political governance. Used descriptively, authoritarianism is defined by the removal of popular accountability or participation in the decisions of the state and a substantial centralisation of executive power in a bureaucracy. It associates itself with states that are disposed to use heavy mixtures of bureaucratic fiat and coercion. From these co-ordinates, we have the wherewithal to develop a descriptive categorisation of coercive and pervasive bureaucratic governance and to call this authoritarianism. But, from a Marxist tradition of political economy, it is difficult to discern the salient ways in which authoritarian state practices relate specifically to the social relations of capitalism. There is a need for a logic of articulation between authoritarianism and neoliberalism, a means to generate a conceptualisation of authoritarian neoliberalism. This logic needs to move beyond the recognition that all capitalist states contain 'moments' or tendencies of authoritarian practice because this renders the coupling of authoritarianism and neoliberalism largely descriptive.

This article will treat authoritarianism as a distinct state form that derives from national political economies in which there is no universally-dominant bourgeoisie. In these countries, property relations are not near-universally based in private property; the social relations of labour are significantly varied and not based on a near-universal proletarianisation; the capitalist class remains heavily dependent on state power or limited in its social domination; and processes of accumulation are weak and halting.

These broad conditions prevail throughout Africa. Land tenure is sustained through combinations of collective, lineage, and freehold forms and small and medium-sized businesses typically enjoy formal and informal entitlements to their assets and property. African capitalist classes remain strongly intertwined with the factional dynamics that contest access to state power, and they are also dominated by international capital in those sectors where there is global interest. Class relations are commonly interstitial: combinations of wage work, trading, agriculture, frequent migration, good and bad years, debt and credit, legality and illegality. People's labour is organised around 'multiplex' labour: small-scale farming, entrepreneurship, wage employment (casual and formal, temporary and permanent), trading and craft

production. The social relations of labour are defined by complex differentiations and a not inconsiderable contingency in which sustained and large-scale employment by capital is absent. And, within African bourgeoisies, accumulation is defined by low-technology and low-productivity forms of production that do not generate strong processes of transformative change.

Authoritarianism is a political response to these socio-economic circumstances that prevail in post-colonial African countries, an historically-specific state form that coalesces around the major-order political challenge of developing a strong capitalist class that might drive a process of accumulation and transformation. And, we can see this authoritarian state-form within a global historical context.

Nicos Mouzelis's (1986) and Clive Thomas's (1984) conceptualisations of authoritarianism are a useful starting point here.¹ In Mouzelis's analysis of post-oligarchic 'semi-peripheral' states, he sets out a nuanced account of the rise of authoritarianism in southern Europe and Latin America in the 1920s.

Authoritarianism is a mode of governance that aims to deploy centralised and purposeful state power to promote the structural transformation of the economy in situations where existing classes and property regimes seem unable to do so (1986 pp. 184-196). Thomas analyses 'peripheral' states in similar ways, but from a *Marxisant* dependency perspective. He recognises the weakness of national bourgeoisies and the absence of a process of capitalist development and relates this to a state-form in which capitalist classes and the state develop authoritarian modes of governance to shore up their power against popular discontent (1984: 82-88). Thus, in both analyses, authoritarianism is a mode of rule based in a particular historical circumstance which can be shorthanded as capitalist transition, analogous to the general patterns of Africa's post-colonial condition.

We have defined neoliberalism as a universal social project of marketization and authoritarianism as a specific state-form that emerges in countries in which the bourgeoisie is weak and capitalist development requires centralised and forcible state action. We need now to connect these two together in order to set out a workable definition of authoritarian neoliberalism. This is not entirely straightforward. Authoritarianism, in our conceptualisation, is not simply those facets and tendencies of states to act undemocratically by deploying bureaucratic and police compulsion to aspects of social life. In this more descriptive rendering, *all* states are in some degree authoritarian. The condition of the authoritarian state is one of diverse social relations that are partially subjected to the domination of capital which poses a major political –strategic question about capitalist transformation (in mainstream social science 'development'). It is this condition that generates systemically not contingently – states that aim to use force and fiat to support capitalist classes and reorder complex social relations in the image of the market.

But, the socio-economic doctrine of neoliberalism is one means to this aspirational end. There is no perfect comity between authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Indeed,

¹ For the purposes of analytical transparency, I should note that Thomas writes within a broadly Marxist framework, but Mouzelis a more pluralized and Weberian fashion. This is a conflation of the two for my own purposes.

in Mouzelis and Thomas, the authoritarianism of the (semi) periphery is distinctly *dirigiste* in ways that would be anathema to any self-respecting neoliberal. Nevertheless, it remains the case that a fundamental legitimacy claim asserted by advocates of neoliberalism is its ability to generate capitalist transformation. Thus, we define authoritarian neoliberalism as a 'subspecies' of authoritarianism, distinguished by a bundle of practices and institutions that construct states that use bureaucracy and coercion to construct, enforce and discipline societies into marketised forms in the faith that, by doing so, competition and entrepreneurship will generate capitalist transformation.

This definition orients an analysis of authoritarian neoliberalism in Africa in a certain direction. It asks questions about the wherewithal of authoritarian neoliberalism to promote capitalist transformation; and it remains open to the possibility that other kinds of authoritarianism – other subspecies – are also historically possible.

Neoliberalism in/and Africa

Yes it hurt, yes it didn't work

Neoliberalism was, *ab initio*, a global project, not a 'western' one. The clearest example of this is the introduction of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in Africa from 1979 onwards (van de Walle 2001: 215). SAPs were credit packages designed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, disbursed to debt-distressed African countries and conditioned on the adoption of a set of policies which had as their overarching aim the neoliberalisation of development strategy. Policy changes included central bank independence, the removal of exchange rate controls, the introduction of technologies to promote fiscal discipline and the reduction of budget deficits, the removal of quotas and lowering of tariffs on international trade, the opening up of economies to foreign direct investment, the removal of price controls, the removal of state-owned trading agencies, and the privatisation of state-owned enterprises.

This is not the place to recall the misfortunes of structural adjustment in Africa. There is a very large literature that does this.² But, the fact that over 200 SAPs were (in some degree) implemented in Africa during the 1980s and hundreds more agreements with 'social' and 'poverty reduction' components followed in the 1990s shows very clearly how Africa was at the forefront of the neoliberal project from the latter's very origins. The first neoliberal crises occurred in Africa as currencies went into freefall, low rates of growth dipped further, commodity price spikes scoured real disposable income levels, and more generally people's livelihoods became even less stable (Mkandawire & Olukoshi 1995).

Food riots generated violent police responses (Lawrence 1986; Walton and Seddon 1994), drastic policy measures were imposed by increasingly centralised cabals focused on the Ministry of Finance and/or the Presidency, new or revived forms of struggle over new opportunities for enrichment by factionalised elites rendered

² For example Campbell & Loxley (1989); Mohan et al. (2000); SAPRIN (2004).

governance partial, incoherent, violent, and unpredictable. Accountability of the government to citizens was constantly undermined by accountability of the government to the World Bank, IMF, and aligned bilateral donors. Formal constitutional and legal measures to introduce multi-party politics made little difference to these substantively authoritarian practices, a condition described by Mkandawire as choiceless democracy (Mkandawire 1999).

In a nutshell, for Africa, neoliberalism has largely been realised through centralised and undemocratic state practices that resemble authoritarianism. Not only did it generate massive amounts of social harm and instability, it also generated at best weak responses in terms of economic recovery, reduced debt, or a recovered inflow of foreign direct investment (Bond 2006; Bush 2004).

Welcome to the desert of the neoliberal real

Reem Koolhass asserted that 'Lagos isn't catching up with the world, the world is catching up with Lagos.' This stylised provocation has some insight that we can bring to bear on our interest in the interplay of neoliberalism and authoritarianism. It suggests that Africa's especially intense and protracted subjection to the neoliberal project offers possible meanings to the fortunes of the project in other places. We can identify three cardinal examples of this.

1. The neoliberal project is intrinsically crisis-ridden (Harvey 2007). Indeed, the notion of 'crisis' is something of a misnomer for what are often more akin to permanent and severe instabilities. Neoliberalism *is* crisis. The currency crashes, recessions, turbulent governance, and civil instability that visited African countries throughout the 1980s are examples of phenomena that might now properly be understood as global and immanent to the neoliberal project. Analogous neoliberal crises have taken place in large Latin American economies in the mid 1980s, Russia and the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s, Southeast Asian countries in 1997, Latin American countries (again) in the early 2000s, in the US in 2001 (dot com), and of course pretty much everywhere since 2007.³ No sensible economist is arguing that the causes and conditions of the 2008 crisis have been resolved. Crisis and austerity are a way of life (Evans and McBride 2017).

The specifics of these crises are hardly all the same but they are underpinned by *laissez-faire* macroeconomics, the rising power of finance capital, global deregulation. The neoliberal project has bequeathed the world an era of uneven and combined permanent crisis management (McNally 2009). It is no exaggeration to say that the neoliberal project generates a systemic intensification of economic crisis in order to survive those crises and in the process create the possibility of more forceful realisations of its worldview (Crouch 2011; Mirovski 2013).

2. The implementation of neoliberalism involves impositions and coercions by the state. These vary widely in form and intensity but the impositional and coercive reflex is immanent to the neoliberal project, not incidental or momentary trait. It might involve the removal of policies from public accountability, the creation of

³ I am starting in 2007 because this is when sudden spikes in food prices generates extreme urban livelihood stress amongst the poor throughout the world.

neoliberal cabals (sometimes labelled as ‘champions’ and ‘change agents’ in neoliberal Doublespeak) to propound reforms, the deployment of the police to enforce policies that generate social protest, the recourse to global regulatory change in order to present policies as inevitable fate rather than political decision, and the creation of ‘shadow elites’ who straddle think-tanks, universities, private capital and governments to shore up the power of the neoliberal project. And it might involve bare dispossession (Harvey 2004).

In the 1980s, issuing out of the general anti-statism which was galvanised by the ‘Berg Report’ (World Bank 1981), structurally adjusting African states underwent a forcible ‘roll-back’ in their activities and material base (Woodehouse 2003). The emaciation of (often already weak and unstable) African states tended to exacerbate deeper governance crises in which the core authority and institutional coherence of state seemed uncertain. ‘Roll back’ generated forms of governance that were evacuated even of the minimal and procedural accountabilities embedded within single-party states. As a result, subsequently, those who designed and enforced neoliberalism through the IFIs steered lending strategies towards a reconstruction of the state. This reconstruction facilitated two things. Firstly, a stronger infrastructure for the rule of law: more censuses and surveys, more effective tax-raising administration, and more coherent and transparent investment and property law, an increasingly powerful technocratic mode of governance (Harrison 2007). Secondly, a more proactive bundle of institutions to incentivise and enhance private investment and entrepreneurialism: investment promotion centres, support for the development of information communication technologies and training to socialise an entrepreneurial sociability amongst small and medium sized enterprises, the creation of special economic zones (near ports or along corridors) that become subsidised ‘hotbeds’ for new investment, and the development of myriad public-private partnerships in which services are contracted to private businesses (Mawdlsey 2015). Some references by IFIs and Western donors of democracy, civil society, and participation were in reality very much second-order concerns compared with the principal objectives of creating a Hayekian strong state (Gamble 1996) and a governance regime to promote market societies. These two objectives – a leaner and stronger state purposed with the social engineering of a market society – easily resided in a centralised project of statebuilding, prosecuted by centralised and technocratic governing elites.

The neoliberal realities of permanent crisis and a tendential authoritarian response by the state were Africa’s realities from the 1980s and are now the world’s reality. Africa endured an early and distinctly intense iteration of the neoliberal project’s authoritarian statecraft.

3. The neoliberal project is unstable and expansive. The foundational motivation of neoliberalism’s advocates draws focus onto fundamental changes in the state and the economy, but the focus hardly remains there. As a form of social engineering, it might be that neoliberalism projects itself through instruments such as education (Brown 2015), training and the promotion of human capital and resilience (Joseph 2013), techniques of incarceration (Wacquant 2009), the provision of certain kinds of social support which either generate entrepreneurial behaviours through microfinance (Bateman 2010) or intensified labour through “workfare” (Perelman

2011; Standing 2011), and the deployment of psychosocial “nudges” which have as their target the cognitive functions of the brain. There is no necessary sequencing of these facets of intervention: they are likely to be prosecuted in varied and partially-coherent combinations depending of all manner of contextual circumstances. What they represent is neoliberalism’s universal scope of ambition. As this totalising project endures and expands its frontiers are extensive (all countries, all societies) and intensive (all facets, every individual).

Africa offers long-standing and striking examples of this expansiveness. The initial focus on currently liberalisation, international trade deregulation, and budgetary austerity has hardly disappeared but has been overlain with what might be characterised as incrementally ambitious remits. This has involved remaking state institutions, legal reform, encouraging a certain kind of civil society, promoting customer-like attitudes towards public services, putting more development practice into the hands of private companies, and promoting entrepreneurial behaviour through IT, training and microfinance. African countries that have endured neoliberal social engineering for decades have witnessed a shift from macroeconomic, through institutional and social, and into individual change. Africa is the world-regional best exemplar of neoliberalism’s dark rendering of Samuel Beckett’s well-known aphorism: try again, fail better.

In summary, Africa shows clearly three constitutive features of the neoliberal project: its proclivity for crisis, its authoritarian tendencies, and its desire to expand from core macroeconomic strategy into as many aspects of socio-political life as possible. Not only does Africa demonstrate these properties in neoliberalism, it also provides important insights as to how well the project fares, not least because Africa has endured an exceptionally long-lasting and virulently implemented version of neoliberalism.

What Africa shows to the rest of the world is a state of affairs in which protracted neoliberal reform generates short intervals of growth usually concentrated on narrow bases such as a export price change, large investment, or specific and largely isolated sector of the economy (Bracking 2016). This has generated some material improvements in people’s well-being and a reduction in extreme poverty. But, it has also generated sporadic economic decline; a continued uncertainty in livelihoods accompanied by processes of social differentiation; intensified hard work; a rise in fraudulent corrupt and get-rich-quick strategies which often lead to wealth being taken out of country (Ndikumana & Boyce 2011); intensified depletion of natural resources (Woodehouse 2013); and a continued dependence on international resources and validation to sustain basic budgetary and expenditure processes. Neoliberal authoritarianism has also generated its own social resistances (Branch & Mampilly 2015; Harrison 2002). Taking these patterns together, it is clearly the case that neoliberal authoritarianism in Africa has most definitively not generated any evidence of a capitalist transformation (Bush 2007; Rowden 2013).

The loosening grip of neoliberalism

African countries are clearly not rapidly forging ahead in the way that Latin American countries did in the 1960s, Northeast Asian countries did in the 1970s, or East Asian

countries did in the 1990s. Africa, the quintessential neoliberal region, is also the world-region most starkly defined by major-order problems of mass poverty and faltering economic transformation. The major sites of mass poverty reduction, industrialisation, and growth throughout the era of neoliberalism have been outside Africa (Henley 2007). They have, not incidentally, also been in places where the neoliberal project has been relatively weak and where governments have innovated and experimented with the regulation of prices and capital.

Neoliberalism in Africa has been authoritarian in the sense that states have used top-down, centralised and coercive measures to impose the market society, but this has generated fragile and limited success and little evidence of sustained economic transformation. In other words, it has not only failed a “neoliberal test” of generating progress through market liberalisation. It has also failed the “authoritarianism test” within which centralised and coercive governance works to promote the capitalist development and the conditions of possibility for the ascent of a national bourgeoisie. Authoritarian neoliberalism in Africa has been in this sense an absolute failure, neither mitigated by a process of economic development nor an account of successful developmental governance.

This historical lesson has fed into the politics of some African countries. Since the late 1990s, African governments have sought ways to reduce the influence of external neoliberal advocates and to explore developmental unorthodoxies. Some scholars cursorily explain this as largely a result of the rise of China or the Beijing Consensus, but it is surely more profoundly based in the constant concern amongst African states and intellectuals to find better ways to generate economic transformation in countries with mass poverty.

This ‘unorthodox turn’ is presently nothing more than a set of embryonic challenges to neoliberalism. There is not a ‘model’ that one can set out in categorical form. Furthermore, neoliberalism is hardly in decline. Zambia is a good example of how attempts to generate economically-nationalist state strategies can falter and lead to a return to the neoliberal agenda (Fraser 2009; Larmer 2005). But, generally, this turn is significant. It represents a potentially systemic attempt to move away from neoliberalism and to do so in a way that offers a more purposeful authoritarianism than that which realised/realises itself under neoliberal hegemony. For as long as neoliberalism maintains its domineering globalisation, unorthodoxies such as these constitute a kind of resistance, albeit a normatively complex one.

Towards a developmental authoritarianism?

We are using the term authoritarianism here to identify a state form in which centralised and coercive power is deployed systemically and purposefully to generate capitalist transformation in societies in which a capitalist class is present but hardly dominant or possessing the wherewithal to accumulate in a rapidly expanding fashion, drawing in larger numbers of wage labourers. Neoliberal authoritarianism displays the markings of centralised and top-down power but its strategic orientation towards a free-market society renders it unable to countenance the historic necessities of capitalist transformation, a transformation that can take many forms but will always involve *dirigiste* reallocations of property, strong support

for emerging capitals, the disciplining of labour, and a nationalist attitude towards the global political economy.

Let us start by returning to Zambia. In 2011 the Zambian government introduced subsidies on fertilisers through a Farming Input Support Programme (Whitworth 2015). This shift was articulated through a revived sense of national development purpose, explicitly identified as against the grain of global neoliberalism (Larmer & Fraser 2007). The use of price subsidies on fertiliser or improved seeds against IFI advice commenced in Malawi in 2005 during a period of malnutrition and near-famine and in response to political pressures to move beyond neoliberal agricultural policy (Chinsinga 2007; Mpesi & Muriaas 2012). The subsidies generated a positive production response, although the modalities of the subsidies and their longer-term impact have been less clear and less positive (Chirwa & Dorward 2013). The premise of these interventions is that agriculture will not develop without state regulatory intervention in agricultural markets and specifically that most sacrosanct facet of the economy for neoliberals: prices.

One might add to the evidence regarding regulatory innovation in agricultural development. There has been a push back against foreign investment in which a 'national interest' of one kind or another takes political priority. There are examples of this in relation to Mozambique and Tanzania (Monson 2006; Pitcher 2003). In Tanzania in particular since the presidency of John Magufuli, FDI contracts have been renegotiated especially within the mining sector, although there remain substantial reservations concerning the extent to which the Tanzanian state is able to promote capitalist transformation (Gray 2015).

There are other examples. One of Kenya's cash transfer schemes does not follow normal donor approaches and is set up to avoid dependence on external sources largely as a result of concerns with state legitimacy and social stability (McCord 2010: 16). Mali's decentralisation plans and their financial management involved a rejection of World Bank programme advice and a strongly-defended national programme which donors eventually bought into (Bergamaschi 2008). Cameroon and Senegal re-introduced tariffs on chicken imports to protect their own poultry industries (Johnson 2011). These policies are clearly not in keeping with the neoliberal worldview. However, these kinds of unorthodoxy can only be seen as specific and unsystemic: reactions to especially difficult aspects of neoliberal reform. They do not offer a clear alternative model to neoliberalism; far less evidence of resistance of the kind that advocates of global social justice might wish to see. But, this is not the whole story.

In his work on political settlements, Mushtaq Kahn (2010) identifies a set of key diagnostic concepts that relate closely to the ability of the state to act in non-liberal ways in pursuit of capitalist transformation. The core point is that the state's allocation of resources will vary in stability and efficacy according to how it maps onto the relative power of different social groups. Within this general terrain, a strategic meta-question emerges which is: how to promote transformative growth within a set of social relations that potentially destabilise the power of the elite group/coalition that controls government? This is the growth-stability trade-off. It relates closely to the strategic pressure that generates authoritarian governance in

African economies and it offers an articulated analytical framework through which to evaluate the emergence on unorthodox development policies.

In an African context, this framing has been used to identify in some states a 'developmental patrimonialism' in which the opaque and strategic allocation of rights to accumulate are conditioned on the achievement of medium-term performance goals (Kelsall 2013; Whitfield et al. 2015). In essence, the allocation of credit, subsidy, protection, or a more general political support is actioned in the expectation that the recipients – part client and part private business – will innovate, invest, access new markets, or increase output. Ethiopia (Gagliardone 2015; LeFort 2012; Oqubay 2015; Vaughan & Gebremichael 2011) and Rwanda (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi 2012) are key examples of this, although one can also identify less clear versions of this in Angola (Croese 2016; Wolf 2017), Nigeria (Ovadia 2016) and Ghana (Chalfin 2010). Another broader example is Uganda's National Development Plan (Hickey 2013).

These are not randomly-chosen country cases from the region. In each of these cases, some structural change has taken place and it has done so in part as a result of strategic and authoritative state action. What matters most within the political dynamics of these policies is the extent to which the rights to accumulate allocated or confirmed by the state generate strong investment and growth responses from capital, and this is centrally dependent on the incentive structures integrated into the patrimonial relationship. In Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Uganda, these practices have been integrated into a strong politics of security and national interest; in Nigeria, Ghana, and Angola one finds a politics of resource nationalism, although it would be a stretch to characterise this politics as anything more than emergent.

Let us take one country case in a little more detail. Rwanda has negotiated an uneasily positive relation with the IFIs in which it both cleaves to core neoliberal macroeconomic directives and maintains a strong sense of national interest and a willingness to deploy other development strategies. The Rwandan government seems more akin to developmental rather than neoliberal authoritarianism in which development is itself a means to consolidate state power (Harrison 2017, Mann & Berry 2016). Most centrally, the government has constructed a complex and opaque network of both political support and discipline in connection with a set of diversified companies. This pattern of ownership is defined by ultimate ruling party control but legally private ownership and management. These companies are politically tasked with generating investment in new areas, exporting, and finding ways to grow rapidly (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi 2012). In agriculture, the government has maintained subsidies on fertilisers and seeds at considerable cost and in the face of the anxieties of donors. It has done this as part of a concerted project to improve the productivity of smallholder agriculture, a project that has also involved broader and deeper efforts to transform productivity (Harrison 2016). The government has also tried to find non-neoliberal ways of generating some financial depth using compulsory contribution mechanisms (Beruhia 2016: 640). More recently, the government has introduced a Made in Rwanda strategy which has involved a ban on the importation of second-hand clothing and a stronger remit for the government (especially through the Rwanda Development Board) to push for local content in FDI and growth in national manufacture.

In relation to Rwanda and related cases, it is important not to overstretch the evidence. None of these authors are suggesting that their cases are definitive examples of a systemic alternative to neoliberalism let alone a wide-ranging developmentalism. But, there is in each case both unorthodox strategy-making and a salient politics of developmental transformation, even if buried within or against other discourses. This is historically significant; these kinds of formations would have been unthinkable in the late 1980s. And, there is evidence in all of these countries of sustained economic growth, even if not structural transformation.

What these examples do show is how unconvincing the neoliberal form of authoritarianism is for the purposes of generating sustained transformative growth. Even with such immense inputs of resource, technical assistance, and knowledge generation, African governments which achieve a modicum of stability and growth tend eagerly to explore ways out of the neoliberal grip.

Conclusion

Let us summarise the argument. We have used the concept of authoritarianism within a Marxist political economy framework to identify a state form that derives from the social relations of a capitalist economy in which the bourgeoisie is weak and there is a prevailing and complex productive economy based in small-scale and low-productivity livelihoods. In these circumstances, there is a disposition for states to seek top-down and forceful ways to generate growth and accumulation through political support for capital. This is what underpins the more descriptive accounts of authoritarianism in their condemnation of undemocratic and centralised modes of governance. We have conceptualised neoliberalism as a universal project to make the world in the image of a free-market society, best understood through the practices of those who champion the project. We have argued that the African experience with neoliberalism is long-lasting, highly developed, and based within authoritarian co-ordinates of governance. In this sense, Africa offers us a worrying image of where neoliberal authoritarianism leads: systemic social repression, low growth and instability, insubstantial performances of participation and accountability. If other regions are beginning to see these dynamics, it is important to bear in mind that they are long-standing in Africa and in this sense, darkly, Africa is a world-leader. Taking this dour audit into account, we moved on to demonstrate how the core purposes of authoritarianism are not inextricably wedded to a marketising project and that some African governments and intellectuals are pushing to move into more developmental modes of development strategy-making.

It would be erroneous to offer this evidence as an embryonic new model. There has been for some time a desire – partly ideological – to identify an African developmental state but the substance of these arguments is usually rather fragile. What the evidence does suggest is that the authoritarian state form is more developmentally effective when uncoupled from the demonstrably weak marketising project of neoliberalism. In a sense authoritarian neoliberalism is the worst of both worlds for African countries which have small economies, mass poverty, and small industrial sectors. It is all of the pain and little gain beyond the pockets of upper middle class estates and shopping malls.

Making this argument implies a rejection of neoliberalism but a more relativised approach to authoritarianism. The suggestion is that authoritarian states might be effective development actors when untied from neoliberal doctrine. This point-of-view contrasts with the increasing concern with the depoliticisation, surveillance, securitisation, and centralisation of politics in Western countries. But, this contrast is more apparent than real. Concerns with undemocratic and centralised governance in developed capitalist states are entirely valid but they do also rely on a more descriptive – perhaps even neo-Weberian – categorisation. The social relations of production in Western states are not like those that prevail in African countries. If we are to derive conceptions of the state from the Marxist tradition, there must be clear conceptual distinctions between the kinds of social formations within which the state resides. In spaces where the major political question beyond basic stability of rule is economic transformation, authoritarianism occupies an indeterminate position. It is both a mode of governance integrated into a country's social relations, a coercive and centralised set of practices, and the best hope for countries with mass poverty to create the conditions of possibility for mass poverty reduction.

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